

Comprehensive Plan

Description

A comprehensive plan, sometimes called a master plan, provides a broad vision for the future growth of a community. It is often formulated using the guidelines from previous community visioning exercises and strategic plans. A comprehensive plan is the next level of detail in the planning process from the basic community visioning steps. Typical elements of a comprehensive plan include projections of population growth and correlated plans for transportation, utilities, and community facilities to accommodate or direct that growth. The comprehensive plan is typically implemented through zoning codes and subdivision regulations. It serves as a guide for officials when reviewing development permits and applications to rezone individual sites. In communities where zoning is not present, the comprehensive plan serves as a blueprint that guides public actions about infrastructure or other community investments.

According to the Indiana Code, the purpose of a comprehensive plan includes the “promotion of public health, safety, morals, convenience, order, or the general welfare and for the sake of efficiency and economy in the process of development” [Indiana Code 36-7-4-501]. A comprehensive plan is required to include the following elements:

1. a statement of objectives for future development;
2. statement(s) of policy for land use development; and
3. statement(s) of policy for the development of public ways, public places, public lands, public structures, and public utilities.

Comprehensive Plans may also include a number of optional elements listed in IC 36-7-4-503.

While the Indiana Code requires only the most basic elements, comprehensive plans typically contain a number of additional elements, including analyses of existing demographic, economic and land use trends; goals, objectives, action steps, and policies; and a future land use map. More detailed comprehensive plans may include chapters that address housing, economic development, natural or cultural resources, open space and recreation, transportation (including multi-modal options), fiscal impacts, utility expansions, community facilities, timelines and costs for implementation. Comprehensive plans also can include subarea studies which address infill areas, brownfields, corridor development, or annexation. Within these additional elements and chapters, effective comprehensive plans identify specific strategies, recommendations and agencies or organizations to implement the plan.

In Indiana, before a comprehensive plan is adopted, there must be a minimum of one advertised public hearing held by the plan commission. This provides the public an opportunity to voice their concerns, offer suggestions, and see the plan before it is approved by the legislative body. Effective plans include more extensive public participation than is required by law. Citizen involvement should start early so that all stakeholders can gain consensus and develop ownership of the plan. Often, steering committees are established which focus on the main individual elements of the plan (i.e. housing, economic development, recreation, infrastructure, etc.). Through this community participation, a more accurate vision for the future of the town, city, or county can be established.

Comprehensive plans may be adopted once the required public hearing(s) have been held. The plan commission approves the plan for adoption and recommends it to the town or city, or county Commissioners. The legislative body then adopts a resolution which approves the comprehensive plan. This is done by a majority vote and is not subject to any further approval. The legislative clerk must then post at least one copy of the comprehensive plan on file in the office of the county recorder.

Comprehensive plans are most effective when they are treated as documents that change with the conditions and the values of the community. Typically, comprehensive plans address long-range issues of the community. A common time-frame for comprehensive plans to cover is ten years. However, these plans should be reviewed periodically and updates be made as needed.

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Relevant Statutes

- Indiana Code 36-7-4-500 to 512

Capacity Recommendations

A plan commission must be established in order to adopt a comprehensive plan and subsequent development regulations such as zoning [IC 36-7-4-200]. Comprehensive plans can be prepared by plan commission staff or by consultants. More detailed plans require increasing levels of technical expertise to prepare.

Guidelines / Considerations for Implementation

- Should have a Plan Commission established prior to beginning processes
- Limited effectiveness if plan is not followed up with implementation tools such as zoning and subdivision control
- Need public input throughout entire process
- May be difficult to achieve consensus
- Need professional planning staff or consultant services to create comprehensive plan

Example Ordinances

No example ordinances are available for this tool

Example Studies

- **American Planning Association Examples:** This APA website includes 11 examples of current comprehensive plans for U.S. counties. The examples include counties with a variety of population size, demographics, issues and level of detail included in the plans. [\[http://www.planning.org/pas/comprehensive.htm\]](http://www.planning.org/pas/comprehensive.htm)
- **Muncie-Delaware County, IN Comprehensive Plan:** Created in 1999, the Muncie-Delaware County Comprehensive Plans documents updated data and public opinions of current conditions and future expectations for the community. Based on the collected information and trends, the plan provides guidelines for future land use, transportation, urban design, and policy developments. [\[http://www.co.delaware.in.us/Departments/PlanCommission2/Zoning/CompPlan/compPlanMain.HTM\]](http://www.co.delaware.in.us/Departments/PlanCommission2/Zoning/CompPlan/compPlanMain.HTM)
- **South Bend, IN Comprehensive Plan:** South Bend had not updated its comprehensive plan since 1961. This plan provides a vision for the community through 2025. The plan is presented on a designated city website that shows the entire planning process that produced the final product. [\[http://www.southbendcityplan.org/\]](http://www.southbendcityplan.org/)
- **Blacksburg, VA Comprehensive Plan:** The Blacksburg 2046 Comprehensive Plan is one of the nation's first digitally interactive comprehensive plans. The goal of the plan is for it to be a "blueprint" for all land use decisions, community programs, public and private sector initiatives, and investment in facilities and infrastructure. [\[http://www.blacksburg.gov/comp_plan/\]](http://www.blacksburg.gov/comp_plan/)

Helpful References and Links

- **Indiana Planning Association's Citizen Planner's Guide - Part 7 – Comprehensive Plans:** This publication is part of a series published by the Indiana Planning Association. Its intended purpose is for training citizen planners, including planning commission members, board of zoning appeals members, neighborhood organizations, and citizen committees. The guide addresses why communities plan, what is in a plan, how the planning process works, how to evaluate a plan, and how a plan is adopted. [\[http://www.indianapanning.org/Citizen/7_ComprehensivePlan_2005.pdf\]](http://www.indianapanning.org/Citizen/7_ComprehensivePlan_2005.pdf)

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- **Purdue University Extension - How Good is Your Comprehensive Plan?:** This brief article provides general information on comprehensive plans, how the plan is amended and how often it should be updated. [\[http://www.ces.purdue.edu/extmedia/ID/ID-227/ID-227.html\]](http://www.ces.purdue.edu/extmedia/ID/ID-227/ID-227.html)
- **Purdue University Extension – “The Comprehensive Plan”:** This article provides general information and an overview of comprehensive plans. [\[http://www.ces.purdue.edu/extmedia/ID/ID-234.html\]](http://www.ces.purdue.edu/extmedia/ID/ID-234.html)
- **Maryland Department of Housing and Community Development – Preparing a Comprehensive Plan:** This publication provides a set of models and guidelines for developing a comprehensive plan for a small town or city. The sample plan is organized as follows: outline; public participation; visions for growth and protection; goals, objectives & policies; planning guidelines; and data resources. [\[http://www.mdp.state.md.us/smartgrowth/pdf/mmg13a.PDF\]](http://www.mdp.state.md.us/smartgrowth/pdf/mmg13a.PDF)
- **Community Planning: An Introduction to the Comprehensive Plan (Barbara Becker and Eric Kelly, 2000)**
This guide helps planners work with communities that are developing new comprehensive plans or updating existing ones. Drawing upon actual case studies, it combines the best of theory and practice to show how to craft a plan that meets individual community needs. Community Planning emphasizes topics such as the feasibility of a comprehensive plan; the varying roles of professionals, citizens, and elected officials in crafting the plan; and the plan’s relationship to land-use controls, housing, and economic development. Each chapter includes exercises, discussion questions, and suggested readings.
- **The Small Town Planning Handbook (Daniels, Keller, Lapping, Segedy, 2007):** This reference published by the American Planning Association is a resource for small town and rural planning. It addresses many issues that are present in these types of communities and how to address them through comprehensive planning and development regulations.
- **Guidelines for Preparing Urban Plans (Larz Anderson, 1995)**
This book is often used as a comprehensive textbook for planning education programs. It cites many examples throughout the nation and provides a step by step guideline for the entire planning process.

Helpful Contacts

- **Community Based Projects (CBP) –** Ball State University’s College of Architecture and Planning hosts an outreach and service program using students for fairly elementary technical assistance on a variety of small town and rural issues, including comprehensive plans.

Community Based Projects
College of Architecture and Planning
Ball State University
Muncie, IN 47306
(765) 285-1350
cbp@bsu.edu
<http://www.bsu.edu/cbp/>

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- **Center for Urban Policy and the Environment** – As part of the School of Public and Environmental Affairs at IUPUI, this organization can assist in a variety of planning related matters.

334 N. Senate Avenue,
Suite 300
Indianapolis, IN 46204
Tel: (317) 261-3000
Fax: (317) 261-3050
urbanctr@iupui.edu
<http://www.urbancenter.iupui.edu/AboutTheCenter/>

- **Indiana Planning Association List of Consultants** – This resource lists numerous private consulting firms that offer planning services. Some of the most common tasks performed by consultants are the formation of comprehensive plans. However, the resource is only available to Indiana Planning Association members.

Indiana Planning Association
PO Box 44804
Indianapolis, IN 46244
(317) 767-7780
<http://www.indianaplanning.com>

Other Possible Funding Sources

Completing a comprehensive plan can be costly and generally takes approximately a year to complete. While most comprehensive plans are funded through traditional local government revenues, a few grant opportunities exist.

- **Planning Grants:** planning grants are funded with Federal Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) dollars from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD). In Indiana, they are administered by the Indiana Office of Community and Rural Affairs (OCRA). The goal of the program is to encourage communities to plan for long-term community development. Community Leaders can apply for projects relating to such issues as infrastructure, downtown revitalization, and community facilities. To be competitive, projects must demonstrate:
 - The area to be served has a substantial low- and moderate-income population (51% or greater) or is designated a slum or blighted area by local resolution.
 - They meet a goal of the Federal Act
 - The particular planning initiative addresses established long-term community priorities
 - The funds granted will have a significant impact on the overall project
 - The community has a strong commitment to the project; and
 - The project is ready to proceed upon the grant being awarded and will be completed within 12 months (source: Indiana Office of Community and Rural Affairs <http://www.in.gov/ocra/index.html>)

Kathleen Weissenberger
Community Affairs Director
(317) 232-1703
kweissenberger@ocra.in.gov

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- **Other HUD Funds:** Other Community Development Block Grants are available to communities of 50,000 or more citizens or communities designated as entitlement communities. Information can be obtained from:

HUD Indianapolis Field Office
151 N. Delaware Street
Suite 1200
Indianapolis, IN 46204-2526
(317)226-6303 ext. 6790
robert_f._poffenberger@hud.gov
<http://www.in.gov/ocra/index.html>

Program Objectives and Issues Addressed

- Growth Management
- General Planning
- Vision or direction for future growth
- Growth and development
- Annexation
- Transportation circulation
- Lack of transportation choices
- Few housing options
- Decreasing amount or destruction of open space or cultural resources
- Poor visual aesthetics
- Poor or lack of non-residential development
- Sprawl

See Also

- Community Visioning and Strategic Planning
- Land Use Plan
- Neighborhood and Sub Area Plan